

The Individualized Artist Success Plan: An Asset-Based Perspective on Dis/Ability

By: Christopher Hall

In special education, too often the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) becomes a document that is informed by the medical model of dis/ability and defines students by their perceived deficiencies rather than by their strengths. In this presentation, drawing on the tenets of Disability Studies, Art, and Education, Christopher Hall introduces the Individualized Artist Success Plan (IASP), which uses an asset-based framework to build on student strengths, and urges educators to re-frame their understanding of dis/ability to create the optimal learning environment for their students. By using an asset-based framework, informed by their student's needs, educators can use the IASP to adapt their professional practice rather than forcing their students to adapt to them. The IASP is presented as a counter narrative to the IEP and is used as a tool for educators to create a comprehensive view of student strengths, and creating an opportunity for educators to determine what they need to be successful. This includes embedding student interests in the curriculum, providing communication supports to provide access to students, creating environmental supports to remove obstacles to learning, and using positive reinforcement strategies to build confidence and set students up for success.

All of these components require educators to truly know each of their students academically, creatively, and socially. This involves developing strong relationships built on trust. Through these relationships, educators will get a more accurate view of a student's background knowledge, allowing them to build on their strengths. They will be able to embed the interests of their students in the curriculum which can foster a sense of ownership that will improve engagement. When students see themselves and their interests reflected in the curriculum, they are more likely to take artistic risks, which is a key step in creating a safe learning environment for students. Educators need to ask themselves, "what are my student's interests, and how can I embed them in the curriculum?"

Every student learns and communicates in their own individualized way. This may include communicating through spoken and/or written words but many students communicate through visuals and picture symbols. Visual supports are an essential component to an inclusion classroom because they benefit *all* learners. Communication is a human right, and as educators it is essential to provide students with not only the supports needed to communicate, but also the opportunity to share their "voice" in the classroom. Educators need to ask themselves, "what is

my student's preferred method of communication, and how can I support their communication in the classroom?"

In order to set students up for success, it is essential for the educator to use environmental supports to remove obstacles to learning. One of the best ways to do this is to do a task analysis of each task that students will be required to complete. By analyzing each step that is needed for students to successfully complete the task, the educator will be able to anticipate when students may struggle, and provide them with the environmental supports necessary to eliminate obstacles to learning before they occur. This will help scaffold each activity so students will build the confidence and skills necessary to eventually remove the supports and complete the task independently. Educators need to ask themselves, "what could possibly go wrong when students engage in this task and how can I ensure that they will have the supports necessary to overcome these obstacles?"

Every student needs a little motivation to engage in a classroom activity. For some they are intrinsically motivated, but for others, they may need a little outside reinforcement. By truly knowing each student, you will know if they are motivated by some positive praise, by using a token board to earn a reward, or simply an opportunity to take a break in a special chair. Each student becomes motivated in their own unique way. Educators need to ask themselves, "what motivates this student, and how can I use this as a positive reinforcement strategy?"

By building strong relationships with students and truly knowing their interests, how they communicate, what they need to be successful, and what motivates them, educators can create an IASP that is built on their strengths and will set them up for success. The IASP is best used as a way to reframe how an educator plans an art activity, and urges the educator to adapt the learning environment to meet the needs of the student, rather than forcing the student to adapt to the learning environment. This dynamic shifts the responsibility of student performance to the educator, viewing any perceived "deficit" as a reflection of the flawed learning environment rather than a flaw in the learner. By removing this burden from the student, and placing it on the educator, they are free to express their creativity in their own unique way. This can best be accomplished by spending time getting to know each student, focusing on their strengths, being flexible and adapting to students, anticipating obstacles to learning, and creating a learning environment that sets students up for success.